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Index:

- (1) US House approves "comfort women" resolution, emphasizes human rights aspect
- (2) US House passes comfort women resolution, Abe's historical view of the war rejected
- (3) Editorial: Mistaken historical views must be prevented from developing a life of its own
- (4) Editorial: The comfort women resolution harms Japan-US relations
- (5) US House adoption of comfort women resolution may cast pall on Japan-US relations
- (6) Editorial: Comfort women resolution; Rectify factual errors through joint efforts between government and private sector
- (7) Estimation of Lower House election, based on votes ruling and opposition parties gained in Upper House election

ARTICLES:

- (1) US House approves "comfort women" resolution, emphasizes human rights aspect

Aya Igarashi, Washington

The United States House of Representatives on July 30 approved a resolution asking for an official apology from Japan over the issue of the so-called wartime comfort women. There is the possibility that this issue may again flare as a dispute between Japan and the US in the future as well.

In the full House on the afternoon of July 30 (before dawn on July 31, Japan time), when the resolution was adopted, eight Republican and Democratic lawmakers rebuked Japan.

Tom Lantos (D-CA), chair of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, is a Holocaust survivor. He praised Germany's way of atoning for the misdeeds of the last war, but he blasted Japan, describing it as suffering from historical amnesia.

The female ranking Republican on the House Foreign Affairs Committee, Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-FL), saw the comfort women issue in the same light of violence to women in Darfur in Africa and stressed: "This sort of issue is still a problem even today."

One characteristic of debates on the comfort women issue in the Congress was that the issue was regarded as a present-day human rights issue not a past "historical issue."

This tendency is strong particularly in the Democratic Party, which is portrayed as being pro-human rights and liberal as represented by House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and which has taken the control of the House since the last November mid-term election. But even among the Republicans, there were few who were sympathetic towards Japan.

TOKYO 00003511 002 OF 010

In the public gallery of the hall, former comfort women Yi Yong Su listened to the deliberations on the resolution. In the face of this living witness, Japan's assertion that there were no documents indicating that women had been forced to work as comfort women was ignored and only incurred backlashes.

In contrast to the heated debate in the Congress, the vast majority of the American public is less interested in the passage of the "comfort women" resolution. The Washington Post in its July 30 edition reported on the approval of the resolution in a small story dispatched by a news agency.

Both Japan and the US at one point strived to resolve the issue in a way so as not to let this "thorn" affect the entirety of the Japan-US alliance.

The leaders of the House gave consideration to Japan by deciding to take a vote on the resolution on July 30 after Japan's Upper House election in order to prevent any possible impact on the election. On July 31, the House committee approved another resolution highly praising Japan's assistance to Iraq as a means to keep a balance with the "comfort women" resolution.

The Democrats are positive about strengthening ties with Japan, an ally, envisioning an opportunity to again return the post of president to the party in the 2008 election.

Michael Green, former senior director for Asian Affairs at the National Security Council, said: "The members of the Congress can't say no to human rights issues. They tried to minimize the impact of the passage of the resolution by giving consideration in a meticulous manner."

The Nanjing Incident will mark its 70th anniversary in December of this year. One journalist knowledgeable about the moves of Chinese and Korean organizations in the US commented: "Some have already begun seeking another resolution behind the scenes."

In California, the state from which Representative Michael Honda has been elected, the Korean and Chinese communities are gaining political influence. Honda stressed, "It's incorrect to think I have

acted according to instructions from the Chinese government." But pressure for the submission of a similar resolution is likely to increase every time the composition of the Congress changes, as a result of congressional elections being held every two years.

It is not good if neither Japan nor the US takes any action, even though both sides share the view that they cannot let the comfort-women issue cast a pall on the bilateral alliance. Japan and the US must make even more efforts to put this matter to rest and are urged to constrain themselves even further.

(2) US House passes comfort women resolution, Abe's historical view of the war rejected

TOKYO SHIMBUN (Page 3) (Full)
August 1, 2007

Yasuyuki Oguri, Washington

The US House of Representatives on July 30 unanimously passed a

TOKYO 00003511 003 OF 010

resolution calling on the Japanese government to formally apologize to the comfort women of World War II. The passage of the resolution is another blow to Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, who has suffered from a setback in Sunday's House of Councillors election. Why did the US House of Representatives approve of the resolution? How will the Abe administration respond to the US treatment? This newspaper will attempt to analyze the background of the US House's approval of the resolution and the future of it.

US House of Representatives Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman Tom Lantos emphasized in a statement released immediately before the vote on July 30: "After the end of World War II, Germany made the right choice. Meanwhile, Japan has actively tried to forget." He criticized the Japanese government for refusing to formally apologize.

A number of resolutions urging Japan to apologize over the Imperial Japanese Army's barbaric acts were submitted to the US House of Representatives, but the House did not pass any of them, as the Japanese government's lobbying was successful. The government, however, failed this time around. A source familiar with Japan-US relations said that it was difficult for the Japanese side to oppose a human rights issue.

The reason for the US House having turned a deaf ear to Tokyo's assertion that it has already offered apologies is that Washington has begun harboring doubts about Japan's attitude toward the history issue, although the Japan-US alliance has strengthened through the dispatch of Japan's Self-Defense Forces (SDF) and other cooperation.

Abe claimed in March there was no proof the Imperial Japanese Army coerced the women into brothels. Some lawmakers from the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) and the main opposition party, Minshuto (Democratic Party of Japan), put an advertisement in the Washington Post claiming that there is no historical document proving that foreign women were forced into wartime brothels.

However, these efforts ultimately backfired. The House of Representatives saw Japan's assertion as proof of it not reflecting on its past conduct, prompting it to approve the resolution. US Asia Policy Point Director Mindy Kotler took the view that the US House of Representatives felt annoyed with Prime Minister Abe's influence, as well as trends in Japan regarding (history issue) as seen in the prime minister's remarks. Kotler analyzed the US House expressed its doubts about a change in Japan's historical view of the war.

If Abe mishandles the comfort women resolution, criticism will flare up again

There were cautious views about the comfort women resolution in the US House of Representatives for fear of a possible negative impact on bilateral relations. In the process of discussion on the resolution, which was presented by Democratic Rep. Mike Honda,

Democratic Senator Daniel Inouye protested the trend of calling on Japan to apologize, saying: "The United States also made historical mistakes. But no countries have urged us to acknowledge, apologize and accept historical responsibility." However, Inouye's comment was unable to change the mood in favor of the resolution in the Congress.

Meanwhile, the expectation is that the Japanese government will

TOKYO 00003511 004 OF 010

ignore the resolution from the position that Japan already apologized in the 1993 statement issued by then Chief Cabinet Secretary Yohei Kono. Should Abe offer a formal apology, he will

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likely come under pressure from hawkish Diet members.

If the Japanese government expressly ignores the resolution, Congress might stiffen its position. Although a source familiar with Japan-US relations said that bilateral relations would not worsen by the US House's approval of the resolution, the general view is that unless the Japanese government takes specific measures, the issue will smolder between Japan and the United States.

It is certain that criticism of Abe's remarks in March will grow again as the government failed to prevent the US House of Representatives from passing the resolution. Following the setback in the Upper House election, Abe is now facing difficulty in dealing with the issue.

(3) Editorial: Mistaken historical views must be prevented from developing a life of its own

YOMIURI (Page 3) (Full)
August 1, 2007

The United States House of Representatives adopted a resolution calling on the Japanese government to officially apologize over the so-called comfort women issue. This resolution is apparently based on an erroneous perception of the facts. Although it has no binding power, we cannot overlook the passage of the resolution.

The resolution says: "The Japanese Imperial Army coerced young women in various Asian countries into sexual slavery."

The Japan-US alliance naturally carries an extremely significant meaning in light of Japan's national interests. Both countries have established close ties on the military and economic fronts and also share such core values as democracy and human rights.

Japan, however, must present a counterargument against the resolution, which differs from the actual facts. If a mistaken view of history develops a life of its own, the source of a problem might be left untouched to trouble future Japan-US relations.

In the early 1990s, a certain newspaper reported that the Japanese government had forcibly recruited women under the name of volunteer corps. That article was totally contrary to the facts.

The statement issued in 1993 by Chief Cabinet Secretary Kono included descriptions that could be taken as constituted authorities having brought in young women as comfort women against their will. Reading the statement, many people inside and outside Japan began to have an erroneous perception of the facts.

There is no evidence to prove the government coerced recruited comfort women. The Japanese government has also repeatedly explained that fact.

In Japan, as well, there are some who insist that there was coercive recruitment. Such people, without specifying the contents of what is meant by "coercive," regard the US resolution as only natural.

The resolution says: "The comfort women system is one of the largest

TOKYO 00003511 005 OF 010

cases of human trafficking in the 20th century."

It has been disclosed that the US occupation army made use of comfort stations in Japan. During the Korean War, there were such facilities for South Korean soldiers.

During World War II, there were also comfort stations for German soldiers, and young women in areas occupied by Germany were recruited systematically and coercively.

Why has Congress made only Japan the target of its attack? That is because of the presence of a China-affiliated anti-Japanese group supporting Democratic Congressman Michael Honda, who submitted the resolution. There is not an anti-Germany group. Of course, there is no group pursuing the US military for its "moral" responsibility.

In the Democratic Party-controlled US Congress, a similar resolution to the comfort-women one could be adopted in the future. Japanese diplomats must make more efforts to clear up the United States' misunderstanding.

(4) Editorial: The comfort women resolution harms Japan-US relations

NIKKEI (Page 2) (Full)
August 1, 2007

The approval of the comfort women resolution by the US House of Representatives will probably end up harming Japan-United States relations. This is a worrisome situation.

Meanwhile, the US House of Representatives Committee on Foreign Affairs yesterday was set to approve a resolution thanking Japan for its contributions to the Japan alliance. If this resolution is meant to counterbalance the comfort women resolution, this signals that the committee members themselves recognize the negative effect that the resolution will have on bilateral relations.

This resolution is one of over a thousand that the House approves each year. It is a document that holds no legal binding. Although there is no need to overreact, we cannot close our eyes to the resolution's adverse effects on the relationship between Japan and the US.

The resolution calls for an official apology from the Japanese government and the prime minister. The Japanese government, by means of a 1993 statement by then-Chief Cabinet Secretary Yohei Kono, did officially apologize to the former comfort women. The government also offered them compensation through the Asian Women's Fund.

During his April visit to the US, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe met with President Bush and congressional leaders and stated: "As an individual and as prime minister, I deeply sympathize with the former comfort women who suffered hardship and am filled with regret that they were placed in such painful circumstances." This is close to the official apology called for in the resolution.

Before Abe's US visit, when the US side was intensifying its criticism of Japan regarding this issue, we wrote that "the strangeness of hearing the US criticize Japan more vociferously than China or South Korea is similar to the feeling that Americans get when they hear Japan criticizing the US about its past treatment of

TOKYO 00003511 006 OF 010

Native Americans." We cannot help but feel the same way about the US House's approval of a resolution asking for yet another apology.

This action, which could damage the image of Japan in the US and stir up anti-US sentiment in Japan, is detrimental to both countries. Besides the resolution, an increasing number of negative elements have been growing between Japan and the US.

In Japan, there is a great deal of discontent with the Bush administration's conciliatory approach towards North Korea. Ichiro

Ozawa, the leader of the Democratic Party of Japan, the new majority party in the Upper House, has stated his opposition to an extension of the Anti-Terrorism Special Measures Law. If the Self-Defense Force's refueling missions in the Indian Ocean are discontinued, the US will lose faith in Japan.

Having lost their political momentum, both the Abe and Bush administrations are finding it increasingly difficult to resolve problems. The comfort-women resolution is another unfavorable sign for Japan-US relations. As a result, there is a high possibility that the criticism of the Abe cabinet that is bound to come will act as a kind of centrifugal force putting more distance between Japan and the US.

(5) US House adoption of comfort women resolution may cast pall on Japan-US relations

ASAHI (Page 9) (Abridged slightly)
August 1, 2007

The US House of Representatives approved a resolution on July 30 calling for an official apology from Japan over the so-called comfort women system of forced military prostitution before and during World War II. Ever since the resolution was submitted this January, Tokyo has lobbied against the US House for fear that it will have a harmful effect on Japan-US relations. That did not pay off. Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's words and deeds that drew a strong reaction from the United States attributed to the House's approval of the resolution. Although the position of the United States, which regards the comfort women issue as a human rights abuse, is to give advice as a "friend," the step is likely to leave some hard feelings in Japan. Depending on how matters turn out, the thorny historical issue with neighboring countries might cast a pall over Japan-US relations, as well.

House Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman Tom Lantos (D-Calif.) said in the July 30 session: "Japan's refusal to make an official government apology is disturbing to all who value US-Japan relations." Mike Honda (D-Calif.), a sponsor of the resolution, too, said: "We must teach future generations that this horror must never be repeated again." The resolution was adopted with a majority approval without any objections.

Both Lantos and Honda come from California where there is a large Asian-American population. In fact, in Honda's constituency, Asian-Americans account for about 30% of the total population. With the election of the US House of Representatives scheduled to take place next year along with the presidential election, the wishes of Korean organizations that have lobbied for the adoption of the comfort women resolution cannot be ignored. Honda spent his early childhood in a World War II internment camp where he himself suffered from human-rights abuse. The US Congress, acknowledging its

TOKYO 00003511 007 OF 010

responsibility for the internment of Japanese-Americans, eventually adopted legislation compensating the victims for such treatment during the war. The president also sent letters of apology to them.

Earlier, in the period of the Republican-led US Congress, four comfort-women resolutions were submitted, but none was adopted. The US House adoption of the resolution this time comes partly from the shift of power to the Democrats through the midterm election last year and Prime Minister Abe's words and deeds.

Tokyo's position was that the Japanese government had already apologized, citing the 1993 statement released by then Chief Cabinet Secretary Yohei Kono.

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Then on March 1, Prime Minister Abe told reporters, "There is no evidence to prove there was coercion," adding, "There is no evidence to prove the use of coercion in the narrow sense."

This complex explanation was taken to mean that Japan backed away from the Kono statement, and US lawmakers reacted furiously, saying

Japan had not offered an official apology. The situation worsened with Abe's defiant comment that Tokyo would not offer another apology because the US Congress was about to adopt the resolution.

Finally becoming aware of the deteriorating situation in early April, Abe offered an explanation to President Bush on the phone. That was followed by his apology to Bush and US House Speaker Pelosi during his visit to the United States in late April. The storm calmed down temporarily, but the trend of adopting the resolution again gathered momentum with a full-page protest advertisement that ran in the June 14 issue of the Washington Post, submitted by a group of Japanese lawmakers and others discontented with the resolution.

A sense of mission peculiar to the US

"The adopted resolution is not intended to blame the Japanese people. They are words as a friend." Meeting the press after adopting the resolution, Mike Honda, a sponsor of the resolution, stressed that resolution was not intended to attack Japan.

Mike Mochizuki, a George Washington University associate professor known for his studies of Japan, also said: "The resolution is a message to Japan by American political leaders as their friends. It is not an anti-Japanese resolution."

A perception gap exists between Japan and the United States on the resolution. Above all, America's intent is hard to understand in Japan.

The US House was considerate enough to adopt the resolution after Japan's House of Councillors election. Although it was a fact that the resolution's adoption was triggered by Prime Minister Abe's words, it did not target Abe.

On July 31, the US House also approved a resolution recognizing Japan as one of the most reliable security partners of the United States.

US officials concerned, including Honda, regard the comfort women issue as an abuse of human rights of the victims of sexual slavery.

TOKYO 00003511 008 OF 010

Japan naturally wonders if the US Congress has the power to meddle in other country's affairs. But in the case of the United States, the Congress is not the only one that makes request to other countries regarding a set of "values." The US State Department annually produces a report on trafficking in persons in other countries. This year, Japan was categorized as not fulfilling the minimum standards. American people have a special sense of mission to protect and spread a set of values. This can explain why the US House adopted the comfort women resolution.

Among US congressional members, the comfort women issue is referred to as a "boutique issue," meaning it is not a national priority. That is evident in the lack of similar moves from the Senate that mainly discusses foreign affairs.

With the House's adoption of the resolution, the focus has now shifted to Japan. Japan experts in the United States share the view that it is important for Japan to have a handle on the situation in the United States and abstain from overreacting to the adoption. Asked in the July 30 press conference, "What would you do if Japan did not offer an apology," Honda simply said: "I hope this will serve as a foundation for a new dialogue (between the United States and Japan)."

Former Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense Kurt Campbell, now drafting an Asia policy for the upcoming US presidential race, urged Abe and others to shift their stance on the historical issue. He said: "Even extremely pro-Japanese Americans are displeased with remarks by Prime Minister Abe and other cabinet ministers. It is more beneficial to spend time on present and future issues than to revise or correct interpretations of historical events."

(6) Editorial: Comfort women resolution; Rectify factual errors through joint efforts between government and private sector

SANKEI (Page 2) (Full)
August 1, 2007

The full US House of Representatives approved a resolution calling for a formal apology from the Japanese government on the comfort women issue. Though the resolution is not legally binding, it is of concern that the Congress of the US, Japan's key ally, has adopted a resolution denouncing Japan.

The Abe cabinet has taken a reasonable approach to this issue. Prime Minister Abe during the bilateral summit in late April expressed his deep sympathy with former comfort women, and President Bush highly evaluated his response. Japanese Ambassador to the US Ryozo Kato sent a letter to key members of the House stating that the adoption of a resolution denouncing Japan over the comfort women issue would harmfully affect Japan-US relations over the long term. The Democratic Party leadership in the House has reportedly put off the adoption of the resolution in the plenary session until after Japan's Upper House election, giving consideration to a possible impact of the adoption of such a resolution on Japan's political situation. Aside from the comfort women resolution, the House Foreign Affairs Committee has approved a resolution recognizing Japan's contribution to the anti-terrorist war. It can be said that this represents that Japan's diplomatic effort has made a certain degree of achievements. Even so, however, it was impossible to prevent the House from adopting the resolution in the plenary session.

TOKYO 00003511 009 OF 010

A resolution was added with words indicating that the "the Japan-US alliance is a linchpin in the Asian region"; and it is now at the stage of the approval at the House Foreign Affairs Committee. As a result, the wording of the adopted resolution was milder than that of the initial resolution introduced by Democrat Congressman Mike Honda. However, the resolution's basic errors have been kept intact, as can be seen in the fact that it categorically mentioned that the comfort women system was coercive prostitution for military personnel adopted by the Japanese government during WWII.

It is true that the former comfort women experienced hardships during WWII and deserve sympathy. However, it was private brokers that mainly recruited them. The Japanese government did not coercively recruit them for sexual services. More than 200 official documents the Japanese government has collected over two years prove that.

Concerning the comfort women resolution, Japanese experts, including journalist Yoshiko Sakurai, ran an opinion advertisement in a US daily in which they produced evidence to prove the actual situation of the comfort women. Some have criticized their action as having incurred a backlash from the US Congress. However, offering no rebuttal could mean in the international community acknowledging erroneous historical accounts.

It was also revealed that an organization affiliated with China was pressurizing the House Foreign Affairs Committee chairman in the background. This organization has close ties with the Chinese government. It has criticized Japan on the wartime history issue.

The government and the private sector need to make further efforts to rectify factual errors on the comfort-women issue.

(7) Estimation of Lower House election, based on votes ruling and opposition parties gained in Upper House election

NIKKEI (Page 5) (Full)
July 31, 2007

Close battle likely, if LDP, New Komeito cooperate; DPJ would win landslide victory, if LDP independently fights; Western Japan key to DPJ initiative to take over government reins

Kyodo News Agency yesterday calculated a possible result of the next Lower House election, based on the number of votes each political party gained in the July 29 Upper House election, in which the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ or Minshuto) garnered 60 seats, depriving the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) of its status as the largest party in the chamber. According to a simple calculation, the DPJ would gain 350 seats among a total of 480 seats combining 300 for single-seat constituencies and 180 for the proportional representation portion.

It was only if the LDP and the New Komeito fully cooperated in single-seat constituencies, would they be able to gain 250 seats, including those in the proportional representation segment, enabling them to narrowly maintain their majority. If they fought independently, the DPJ would win a landslide victory in Hokkaido, Saitama, Tokyo, Aichi, Osaka, Hyogo and Fukuoka, where there are more than 10 single-seat constituencies. It would also win in Aomori, Tochigi, Gifu, Wakayama, Tottori and Kagawa, constituencies

TOKYO 00003511 010 OF 010

where it was defeated in the 2005 Lower House election, as well as in three seats out of four in Ehime, where it has never gained a seat before. The DPJ would gain 350 seats in total, combining 85 in the proportional representation segment.

The LDP would win all seats in Gumma, Shimane and Yamaguchi, but suffer a setback in urban areas, only gaining two seats in Chiba and one in Kanagawa. It would gain no more than 85, combining 34 in single-seat constituencies and 55 in the proportional representation portion.

However, if the LDP and the New Komeito cooperated, the situation would be completely different, indicating the reality that the New Komeito has the casting vote. The LDP and the New Komeito would secure all of 11 seats in Fukuoka in stark contrast to the case of the LDP independently running candidates in that region. The coalition would recover from the setback in all single seat-constituencies in the Upper House election this time, where the DPJ made a leap forward. The estimation is that it would be able to gain 165 seats in single-seat constituencies.

For the estimation, votes each party gained in municipalities in the proportional representation segment in the Upper House election this time were tallied, based on single-seat constituencies and proportional representation blocs.

Tabulations of the number of seats each party would gain in the Lower House election, based on the outcome in the Upper House proportional representation segment, highlighted the reality that the DPJ, which won most single-seat constituencies in the Upper House election this time, would fight an uphill battle in single-seat constituencies in western Japan. Provided that the LDP and the New Komeito fully cooperate for the Lower House election, the DPJ would be able to gain only five seats -- two in Hiroshima, one in Tokushima, Kochi and Nagasaki -- in 71 Lower House single-seat constituencies in the Chugoku, Shikoku and Kyushu regions, while the LDP and the New Komeito would gain 66. The result would be similar to that in the 2005 Lower House election, in which the LDP won a landslide victory, leaving the LDP with only seven seats in single-seat constituencies -- two in Okayama, and one in Tokushima, Fukuoka, Nagasaki, Kumamoto and Oita. The result reflects the ruling bloc's solid organizational power.

SCHIEFFER